

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLP #2285/01 2962130
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 222130Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8920
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 8473
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 5822
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 9794
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 7014
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 4067
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0885
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 4388
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 4292
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5884
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0545
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6684
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1454
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RHMFSS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 1491
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002285

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL BL
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: TEARS AND TANTRUMS AFTER THE COMPROMISE

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer, reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: One day after the final voting on a compromise that will give President Evo Morales his January 25 referendum on a modified draft constitution, reactions vary widely. Evo's teary welcome of the announcement (and declaration that he can now die happy) reflects the high stakes at play for his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party. MAS supporters have generally responded favorably to the hope of getting "their" constitution passed, but some more-radical and indigenist groups have accused Evo of betraying their socialist goals. Accusations have been leveled at the opposition, too, with opposition Chuquisaca Prefect Savina Cuellar accusing the national opposition of "betraying Chuquisaca" and declaring that Chuquisaca will not accept the draft constitution. A national opposition contact tells us that the "No" campaign against the draft constitution may be aimed at foiling Evo's second presidency bid in a December 2009 election once the constitution passes. The opposition is divided and weakened, and some government statements suggest that Evo is already looking beyond the constitution and his re-election to further means of consolidating his power. End summary.

- - - - -
MAS Compromises..."for now"
- - - - -

¶2. (C) The new draft constitution (according to an unofficial version made public by leading daily newspaper La Razon) includes text intended to limit Evo to only one more consecutive term: "The terms (in office) previous to the validity of this constitution will be counted in the computation of the new periods of election." This and the reversion to a two-thirds majority (instead of simple majority) to amend the constitution were significant victories for the opposition. Recent statements from the government's chief negotiator, Development Minister Carlos Romero, suggest that some in the government are already thinking of how this agreement can be changed, however. In an interview, Romero said, "Reelection, for now, includes only one term." When asked by the reporter if this was definitive, Romero answered, "That's the policy. Some things

will be left for the future. And we'll see."

¶13. (C) Regardless of whether the MAS is already planning to back out of their concessions to the opposition, Evo has gained his primary goals: a referendum on the MAS constitution and the possibility of reelection (for at least one consecutive term.) Evo's joy at the victory was obvious in television coverage, as he cried and announced that he could "now die happy."

- - - - -
Regional Opposition Feels Betrayed
- - - - -

¶14. (C) Civic committees of Santa Cruz, Chuquisaca, and Beni rejected the national opposition's compromise with the government and announced that they will campaign for the "No" vote in the January 25 constitutional referendum. Santa Cruz's Department Electoral Court announced that the department will not hold a constitutional referendum until there has been an audit of the voter rolls (Note: allegations of voter registration fraud were widespread before and after the August 10 recall referendum that gave Evo a 67 percent win. End note.) Chuquisaca Prefect Savina Cuellar described the national opposition as "traitors" for negotiating a compromise on the draft MAS constitution and for not including the question of full capital status for Sucre. So far, however, there are no indications that the regional opposition would try to block a vote on the constitution; instead they will try to defeat it at the ballot box in January.

- - - - -
National Opposition Helping Regional?
- - - - -

¶15. (C) National opposition strategist Javier Flores (strictly protect) claims that, behind the screens and at the last moment, opposition congressmen were able to get the government to agree to lifting the state of siege in Pando and releasing Pando Prefect Leopoldo Fernandez and the "Pando 14" opposition prisoners. According to Flores, however, there is nothing on paper to document this "gentlemen's agreement." Flores believes the government will honor lifting martial law, but he feels the government will not consider reinstating Fernandez and would only consider freeing the opposition prisoners if they could be called back to face specific charges in the future. Flores claimed that in exchange the opposition agreed to stop publishing information linking foreign interests and Presidency Minister Quintana to the September 11 violence. In fact, on October 21 Quintana publicly apologized to Fernandez for Quintana's statement, made before the September 11 clash in Pando, announcing Fernandez's political death and expressing hope that he would "rest with the worms". (Note: we have no other sources to confirm "backroom" details. End note.)

- - - - -
Opposition Breakdown: National and Regional
- - - - -

¶16. (C) Not surprisingly in the wake of a major victory for the president, cracks are showing in both the national and regional opposition coalitions. Samuel Doria Medina, head of the small National Unity (UN) opposition party, has stated that he will campaign for the "Yes" vote on the MAS constitution. According to Javier Flores, Doria Medina (a national cement magnate) and his party were "far too willing to vote for the referendum without a (substantive) agreement"; Flores joked that "the UN's cement was not very solid." (Note: there has been unsubstantiated speculation that the government may be pressuring Doria Medina through actions against his cement empire. Doria Medina was behind the call for negotiations in congress. End note.)

¶17. (C) Beni Prefect Ernesto Suarez announced on October 22 that he is considering forming a new opposition party to run against Evo in 2009 (thus tacitly admitting that the "Yes"

vote on the referendum will win.) Always the most radical opposition department, Santa Cruz is the most opposed to the new constitution. In fact, according to Flores, opposition members of congress from Santa Cruz held out for a considerable period against the national opposition during the congressional negotiations, under orders of Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas.

¶8. (C) There seems to be little chance that the regional and national opposition powers will pull together. Flores seemed pleased with the disarray among the opposition prefects, whom he called "false gods". Flores said the Santa Cruz regional leadership is "completely discredited" in the wake of the September violence. According to Flores, other regional opposition groups feel that Santa Cruz set them up for failure by leading them to the brink of violence and then failing in the follow-through: people like Pando Prefect Fernandez are now "paying the price." Flores claims to be arguing daily with Santa Cruz Prefect Costas' people, who still "have this illusion that they can win with a hard line.

They already failed with this; no one is going to listen to them." The national opposition considers their success in achieving a compromise on the constitutional referendum a sign that they have taken back power from the previously-ascendant regional opposition leaders.

- - - - -
Going Negative: The "No" Campaign
- - - - -

¶9. (C) According to opposition strategist Javier Flores, the national opposition is reconsidering the "No" campaign in light of the referendum compromise, since the opposition's concessions may make it more difficult for the opposition to oppose the constitution. Many opposition leaders are reevaluating committing resources to the "No" campaign and are instead focusing on the December general elections. The new strategy would be to use the referendum as campaign tool in the December elections, accentuating problems with the economy. The loss of ATPDEA benefits would be used against Evo, with the opposition focusing on complaints from El Alto (a major support base for Evo.) The opposition will also attempt to capitalize on public discomfort at what is seen as increasing Venezuelan involvement in the country. Flores described the constitutional referendum as a kind of trial election to "start chipping away" at Evo's administration.

- - - - -
International Observers Welcome Deal, Take Credit
- - - - -

¶10. (C) International observers welcomed the compromise reached by the opposition and the government in congress. Privately they have, to us, patted themselves on the back for acting as a restraint on Evo's potentially confrontational strategy. Press reports are highlighting their participation as "vital", and international coverage is generally positive. What seems to be getting lost in the relief following a peaceful solution is that, with up to 100,000 MAS supporters surrounding the congress (and, in one instance, setting off dynamite at the gates) Evo brought considerable pressure on the congress, not a standard procedure for relations between the executive and legislative branches.

- - -
Comment
- - -

¶11. (C) While radical groups such as the Indian Pachakuti Movement (MIP) are complaining that the government conceded too much to the opposition in modifying the draft constitution's text, MAS leaders are welcoming the compromise and gearing up for the campaign for the "Yes" vote. Although the opposition, both regional and national, will try to defeat the new constitution, it is likely to pass. Once Evo has his new constitution (which we will analyze in more detail in an upcoming cable), he will be able to focus on his reelection in December 2009. After that, he and his advisors

seem to be looking to the future...a future that could include additional terms for Evo. With the help of Venezuelan funding and state media, Evo has built himself a near-impregnable facade of legitimacy and power. Evo's victory makes the USG less of a target, but we can expect that he will continue to use us as needed to beat the "sovereignty" drum and rally his bases. End comment.

URS